

and necklaces, mugs, spoons, and other ornaments, especially from ladies and other women. One lady alone contributed a hundred pounds, and others, some more some less ; many gave, it was believed, beyond their real means, in order to obtain the benefit of absolution for themselves and their friends. Thus the secret treasure of the realm, which was in the hands of the women, was drawn out. Men and women, rich and poor, gave according to their estate and beyond it, that both their dead friends and themselves also might be absolved from their sins. For absolution was refused unless they gave according to their ability and estate. And many found men-at-arms and archers at their own expense, or went themselves on the crusade. For the Bishop had wonderful indulgences, with absolution from punishment and guilt, conceded to him for the crusade by Pope Urban the Sixth, by whose authority the Bishop in his own person or by his commissioners absolved both the dead and the living on whose behalf sufficient contribution was made/¹

The amount collected was a great triumph for superstition. It displayed the strength of the friars, and the rooted belief among many of Wycliffe's countrymen in those ideas of absolution against which he was so boldly lifting his voice. These ideas were, as they must ever be, the basis of the extraordinary power of the Roman clergy ; in the fourteenth no less than in the sixteenth century the question of absolution was fiercely contested. Wycliffe's bitterest and most prolonged attacks on the Church were made against her conduct in this crusade, and if he ever had a right to be bitter, it was on this occasion. There were two fathers of Christendom, each urging his children of France and England to continue a desolating war which had long exhausted and wearied both parties, each intriguing to bring other forces and other nations into the struggle, and each using every spiritual weapon to bring about a general Armageddon. Yet if there was an anti-Roman party among the English Church authorities, they held their peace and left the heretic to denounce the iniquities of the Papacy.²

¹ Knighton, ii. 198-9; Wals. ii. 71-80.

* *Pol. Works*, i. 19-20, ii. 579-632 ; *S. E. W.*, iii. 242-7, 349-